

ACTION PLANS TO SERVE SELF-REPRESENTED LITIGANTS

1. Description of Need

A committee studied some of the problems and solutions necessary to assist the self represented litigants. Included in this committee was the court, a member of the public, and the Family Law Facilitator.

Specific needs of the self-represented litigants were discussed, and generally there are several areas of concern, including the lack of legal information available to the self-represented litigant, along with limited resources and limited legal assistance.

Presently, we have only the:

AB-1058 Family Law Facilitator available to help self-represented litigants with family law matters.

Elder Law: Lake County District Attorney's Office now has an Elder Abuse Division that investigates and prosecutes elder abuse cases and the Senior Law Project available to the public.

Poverty Law: Legal Services of Northern California and California Indian Legal Services is the source for poverty law. Sutter Lakeside Community Services also provides assistance to the public.

Small Claims Advisor: The court just renewed the contract with Bonnie MacFarlane, Small Claims Advisor, who is available by phone for consultation.

Library Resources: Lake County Law Library located across the street from the court opens to the public 12:30 to 4:30 weekdays. Internet access is available along with normal law library research materials and limited self-help materials.

Generally, self-represented litigants cannot afford legal counsel and have little or no background enabling them to prepare paperwork, understand legal procedures, or research the law. Self-represented litigants generally are unable to adequately present their case to the court in written pleadings, nor orally during court proceedings.

The Lake County Community Focus Strategic Plan was developed through a collaborative process between the Court and the community. Goal 4 of the Plan includes, as part of its objective, to broaden access to the courts, especially for unrepresented and low- or middle-income persons and to increase pro per assistance.

Goal 4: Quality of Justice and Service to the Public

4(c) Broaden access to the courts, especially for unrepresented and low- or middle-income persons.

Objective 1. Juvenile court services - traffic court, special facilitator.

Objective 2. Increase legal resources by education the County Board of Supervisors on providing adequate indigent defense.

Objective 3. Increase Pro Per assistance - facilitator's office, elder law, poverty law, small claims advisor, and library resources.

Objective 4. In cooperation with the State Bar, support development of new alternative dispute resolution programs.

2. Program Areas

The Self-Represented Litigants Committee has identified several goals for this project, including the following:

Educating self-represented litigants

Expansion of services available to self-represented litigants

Expansion of the Family Law Facilitators

Educating self-represented litigants

The court has greatly improved its signage and self-help directional brochures to assist the public. Through expansion of the services provided by the Family Law Facilitator's Office, we are hoping to educate pro per litigants on necessary pleadings and presentation of their pleadings to the court.

Expansion of Services to Self-Represented Litigants

We are hoping to be able to purchase a workstation at the Family Law Facilitator's Office to assist self-represented litigants. Our goal is to be able to hire two part time paralegals so the self-represented litigants will be able to ask questions and get advice regarding issues that they do not understand. We feel that by only providing computer and instructions, only half of the job will be done.

Expansion of the duties of the Family Law Facilitator

Currently, our family law facilitators are part time and only handle AB-1058 work. By law, they cannot provide any assistance other than child support. With this grant we are hoping to expand the Facilitator's Office to assist Pro per litigants in the preparation of documents needed for presentation of their issues to the court, including but not limited to providing:

1. AOC printed pleading forms,
2. typing
3. copying
4. instructions for filing of forms

Criminal Law will continue to be under the Public Defender's Office and through court appointed private counsel. Juvenile dependency and delinquency cases are handled by court appointed counsel and the Public Defender's Office; therefore, these two areas will not be under the duties performed by the facilitator. The Alternative Dispute Resolution program is handled by Priscilla Day.

3. Program Action Plan

Obtain funding as follows:

Line Items	Amount
Labor (2 Paralegals - 15 Hours Week Total)	\$8,200.00
Copier Materials (Toner, Drums, Paper)	1,700.00
Printer Supplies	600.00
Brochures	500.00
Laptop Computer and Laser Printer	3,000.00
Miscellaneous	1,000.00
Total	<u>\$15,000.00</u>

4. Existing Resources

Limited Court staff assistance & Family Law Facilitator
Office space

5. Additional Resources Needed

The Family Law Facilitator's Office is willing to contract with two paralegals to work additional hours (current funding allows for only limited services) in their office space to provide the additional service to pro per litigants. Without this funding this additional service is not fiscally possible at the present time.

This grant would enable the Courts to implement the plan by assisting pro per litigants in the preparation of documents needed for presentation of their issues to the Court, including, but not limited to providing: (1) AOC printed pleading forms; (2) typing, (3) copying, and (4) instruction for filing of forms. Increasing pro per assistance through the Family Law Facilitator's Office is a means to achieve the goals and objectives set forth in the Lake County Community Focus Strategic Plan.

6. Evaluation

We believe this program will be a major success in Lake County. Self-Represented Litigants constantly ask about existing resources to help them with their legal issues, only to find out that our County does not have the

resources to provide them with advice, forms, typing and photo copying services.

Upon completion of this grant process, evaluation of the outcome and results, the court will look for on-going funding to make this service a permanent program.